Compliments of
Lt Col. Jones.

1889
Box 2

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THE BATTLE

—OF—

STONEY CREEK

COMPILED BY

Lieut.-Col. C. S. Jones,

Commanding the Dufferin Rifles
of Canada,

READ BEFORE THE

OFFICERS OF THE REGIMENT

—AND—

THEIR FRIENDS,

DECEMBER 2ND, 1889.

BRANTFORD:

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The Battle of Stoney Creek.

In preparing a paper describing events which transpired over 75 years ago it is almost a necessity to use much information given us by different writers and to take advantage of facts and descriptions gathered from various sources, and while doing so in a paper somewhat curtailed by a time limit, very many incidents and interesting details must, of necessity, be omitted.

How many of us know much about the battle of Stoney Creek, fought at midnight on the 6th June, 1813? How much have our school histories taught us, and how much are they now teaching the youth of our land concerning this famous battle and the mighty consequence of that victory to us as a nation? very little, and still the result of that battle determined whether we should remain under the benign influence of the flag we love so well, or whether our fair land should represent another stripe in the escutcheon of the American Republic.

The battle ground of Stoney Creek has peculiar interest to the writer of this paper

as he has, when a boy, many a time gamboled over the battlefield, and plucked the wild flowers growing on the graves of the heroes buried there, a part of the battle field at the present time being owned by the writer's family who would gladly donate a site for a national monument to commemorate the battle should one ever be erected by a tardy public.

And now let us have a short description of this famous place, so that we may the better understand the relative position and surroundings of the two armies. The battle field is some six miles east of Hamilton, and two miles south of Lake Ontario, on the road leading from Hamilton to the Falls. Stoney Creek is a stream which takes its rise some miles beyond that ridge of land known as the "mountain," the same ridge over which the mighty Niagara thunders. This creek is not perennial, but in the spring a most beautiful falls is formed at the escarpment where the water pours over this lofty ridge in one unbroken descent of 80 or 100 feet. The great symmetrical oval wall of grey rocks from whose summit the water pours into a rocky basin beneath, the majestic evergreen crown of pines and hemlocks encircling and overlooking its brow with conscious imperiousness, the undergrowth that overhangs and fringes like a valance the rugged edge of rocks; and further on the shrubbery which carpets the steep banks of the canyon, looking out on the rich valley beneath and the grand pictur-

esque rocks piled confusedly together make up a picture which the traveller might look upon hundreds of times without losing any of its variety or enchanting picturesqueness. After leaving the foot of the falls the waters dash gaily down over rocky ledges to the level plain below and then course over a complete bed of small, loose stones to its outlet in Lake Ontario. From this it derives its name of "Stoney Creek." It may not be generally known that the writer of the familiar little ballad, "When you and I were y Maggie," took his inspiration from t scene, and the old mill on the ba e stream is the one referred to whe ays:

"I wandered to-day to the hill, Maggie,
To watch the scene below.
The creek and the creaking old mill, Maggie,
As we used to long ago.

And now let us turn for a moment from the scene of beauty and poetic inspiration and ask why should this quiet and peaceful landscape be trampled upon by armed men, and the grassy slopes dyed with heroes' blood.

The animosities engendered during the revolutionary war were still felt by the Americans,(we call them "Americans" for convenience sake, though why the people of the United States should usurp that title when the greater part of North America belongs to Canada, we are at a loss to apprehend), and a feeling of intense hatred of the mother country existed

amongst a considerable number of the people of the United States. Great Britain was then engaged in a terrible struggle with France, at that time the most dangerous of all despotic powers. We are all familiar with the events which led to the declaration of war by the United States, and with the famous decree of France, which pronounced the whole of the harbors of Great Britain in a state of blockade. It was no wonder then that Great Britain should by way of retaliation proclaim the ports of France to be in a state of blockade. These British orders in council were laid hold upon by the American Republic as a reason for a grievance against Great Britain, though that country was entirely opposed to having trouble with the States. The United States assigned one reason and then another trivial in their nature, but undoubtedly the real motive which actuated them was their desire to add another state to their Union. General Hull, of the United States army, with 3,000 troops, crossed the river at Detroit, and on landing issued a proclamation to the inhabitants in which he said: "You will be emancipated from tyranny and oppression and restored to the dignified station of freemen. Had I any doubt of success I might ask your assistance, but I have not. I come prepared for every contingency. I have a force which will break down all opposition and that force is but the vanguard of a much

greater. If, contrary to your own interests and the just expectations of my country, you should take part in the approaching combat, you will be considered and treated as enemies, and the horrors and calamities of war will stalk before you." It is needless to say that within a week General Hull was on his own side of the river preparing to surrender Detroit and it was surrended accordingly.

It is of course unnecessary, in this paper, to refer at length to the landing of the American forces at Newark (now Niagara-on-the-Lake), and to the plucky stand made at Fort George and Fort Massassauga near this village, by a small but brave force against tremendous odds, nor to the sanguinary conflict, later on, at Lundy's Lane, where the British and Canadian forces made such havoc in the ranks of the invading foes, where bravery has never been excelled and true courage never surpassed, nor to the heroic services rendered by Laura Secord the heroine of the war of 1813, who after a perilous and wearisome tramp of many miles through the wilds of the forest brought information to General Vincent, the British officer in command, which was the means of surprising and capturing Col. Boerstler's division of 500 troops, 50 cavalry and 2 guns, Suffice it to say that in the face of outnumbering foes, our forces under Vincent were obliged to evacuate the whole western peninsula and retired to Burlington

Heights, the present site of Dundurn castle. Toronto or York as it was then known, also being at this time in the possession of the enemy.

The clattering of the advancing hoofs of the American cavalry, the clanking of swords, the heavy rattle of the artillery and the long and strange array of invading soldiers, as they filed along the narrow road leading to the heights, struck the few inhabitants with wonder and astonishment. The American forces consisted of two brigades, one under General Winder, composed of the 5th, 13th and 14th regiments of infantry, the other under General Chandler, comprising the 16th, 22nd and 23rd regiments, containing some 1400 men each, together with 400 artillery and 250 cavalry, in all 3550 men, and towards evening on the 5th of June, this large force arrived tired, hungry and thirsty, at a place which was soon to be the scene of disaster and defeat to themselves, but a most brilliant and glorious success for the British—Stoney Creek.

The American camp was pitched on a high bluff of ground extending north and south of the road for a few hundred yards and on this bluff Chandler ordered his cannon to be planted, so that they might sweep the road to the west in the direction of the Heights; on each side of the road, near the guns, slept the artillerymen. Immediately in rear of the artillery Col. Burns and his cavalry camped, the infantry being camped on the flanks of

and in rear of the guns. General Chandler and Winder, with their staff took possession of James Gage's farm house (the family being put down cellar), and finally some 400 yards in advance of the rest a party of about 50 took possession of the old Methodist church on the road side. All the settlers in the vicinity were taken and held as prisoners lest they should carry information to Vincent. The troops were ordered to sleep on their arms that night, the cannon stood in readiness to sweep the road and full directions were given by Chandler when and how to form in line of battle should any attack be made. The men took their much needed supper and lay down upon their arms, weary and exhausted from their long and tiresome day's march. Soon the men were asleep and the only sounds to be heard were the sulien tread of the sentinels, the distant wail of some bird or animal and the dying crackle of the camp fires which revealed indistinctly the forms of the outlying soldiers.

Let us now leave the Americans to their slumber and follow the motions of the British and Canadian troops, who are now entrenched at Burlington Heights with the whole of the western country in the hands of the enemy,—York occupied by the Americans, and the active and powerful fleet of the enemy on the lake near at hand. Their position is indeed an unenviable one, and any other than British soldiers would have abandoned their

post and fled in dismay. But not so with Vincent and his noble band. During the day we have just referred to, runners brought news of the leisurely approach of the enemy, and a detachment of the 49th Irish Royals, under command of Lieut. Crowther, was sent to reconnoitre and, if possible, check the advance. With grim looks and determined tread the heroes left the Heights, crossed the prairie like plain, now covered by the Ambitious City, on which all the fences had been levelled in anticipation of the morrow's fight,down through the deserted farms (whose owners were in the patriot ranks, and their wives and little ones in the fort at the Heights), still keeping a sharp look out for the enemy, through the woods where Bartonville now nestles at the foot of the cliff as far as the Red Hill (about halfway between Hamilton and Stoney Creek); at this point a scout brought word that the advance guard of the Americans was just on the other side of a creek called the "Big Creek," and a bright idea struck the Lieutenant. He would ambush and capture the whole of the advance guard. Concealing his men in the brush he gave strict orders that not a man must move until he gave the word Lying in the brush on that sunny hill side they soon heard sounds of the coming foe, and with every nerve strained to the utmost they waited. Soon the glitter of bayonets showed through the brush, then an oc-

casional glimpse of a cockaded hat. Then round the bend of the hill on the opposite side of the creek came sweeping the veterans of the advance guard. No sooner had they come into full view, than one of our men, with true Irish impetuosity, blazed away at them, utterly forgetful of his officer's orders. The enemy halted, when a volley from the whole detachment was poured into their ranks. That hint was enough, and they broke for shelter, our men getting in another volley to hurry them up. But the Lieutenant's plan was spoiled, and his rage knew no bounds. He is said to have belabored that unfortunate soldier all the way home, and declared he should be hung, drawn and quartered for mutiny. Having ascertained that the main body were preparing to camp at Stoney Creek, he returned to the Heights and reported to General Vincent.

Knowing the importance of having full and reliable information as to their number and position Lieut. James Fitzgibbons, of the 49th, volunteered to visit the enemy's camp, and disguising himself as a settler he took a basket of butter and marched boldly into the American lines, went freely about and noticed their disposition of troops and guards and the evident lack of discipline and want of carefulness among them, sold the butter (and the Americans) and came away satisfied. On receipt of Lieut. Fitzgibbon's report an anxious council of war was held, and Col. Jno. Harvey, D.A.G., was sent out to

wards evening for the purpose of reconnoitering the enemy. Taking Ensigns McKenney and George, two officers of Capt. W. H. Merritt's company of militia, he went forward with the light companies of the 49th. The reconnoitering party went cautiously forward to a position frow which they could view the enemy. Here they saw that the extended line of encampment was scantily guarded, was scattered and disconnected, the artillery poorly supported and the cavalry placed awkwardly in the rear of the artillery. McKenny and George both suggested a night sortie upon them. Harvey saw at once the feasibility of it and concurred. At night they returned and proposed the night attack to Vincent, who without much deliberation moved to carry it into effect. Should he delay action until next day an outnumbering army would be on his position, when he had but ninety rounds of ammunition per man. So scarce was powder in the camp that though the day before had been the King's birthday, (4th June), they dared not waste the small quantity required to fire the usual salute in his honor. In the meantime a runner had brought word that some ships were landing fully 1,000 men at the beach, within two miles of Stoney Creek, to reinforce the American army. An order to move forward startled the sleeping officers and men from the grass whereon they were reposing, and instantly the camp was alive with preparations to march. It was about

half past ten at night that the last of the brave 704, who were to honor themselves and their posterity in their daring encounter, disappeared from the waning light of their camp fires down the lonely road eastward. All charges had been withdrawn from their guns and the flints removed, so that no accidental discharge would alarm the enemy. As the little phalanx wound along their sinuous path towards the enemy's encampment not a word was spoken nor a sound of any kind escaped their ranks, but on they stole like a train of noiseless ghosts. They arrived in sight of the first sentry at nearly two o'clock on Sunday morning, (6th June.) Col. Harvey who was to conduct the attack was in front of the light companies and observed a sentry reclining against a tree which leaned partially over the road about 100 yards west of the Methodist church of which mention has been made. Presently the sentry challenged, when some men of the leading section rushed forward and killed him with their bayonets; his bleeding corpse was cast aside and on they moved with breathless caution. A second challenge "Who comes there!" another rush and the poor sentinel is transfixed, but his agonized groans alarmed a third who stood near the watch fire; he challenged and immediately fired and fled. Not a moment was now to be lost. Harvey whose plans had been perfectly organized before starting instantly ordered

his men to deploy into line. He and Col. Fitzgibbon took the road straight ahead; Major Plenderleth swept round to the left and Major Ogilvie with a party of the 49th opened the right. In the meantime the sentry at the church door had been approached in the shade of the trees and killed and the whole party who were lying in all parts of the church with their heads peacefully pillowed on their coats and boots—were made prisoners The excitement of the men wrought by subdued silence was now at its greatest intensity. With wild and terrific yells they burst with fixed bayonets into the flats upon the astonished Americans. The frenzied outburst of voices seemed to fairly shake the woods, and in the next short minute the whole flats and the opposite hill was a scene of crazy commotion and disorder. The British halted at a rail fence near the deserted camp fires of the enemy to load their guns and replace their flints. By this time the Americans had somewhat recovered from their first confusion while the British were still loading; the dark hill, for nearly a half mile in extent, was suddenly illuminated with a crashing volley from the Americans. It was a grand and awful sight. None but those who actually witnessed it can form a true conception of the ghastly sublimity of the spectacle. Following the dreadful flash and crash came a silence yet more impressive broken through by the

clinking of ramrods and groans of the wounded and dying. Now an ominous faint "click, click, click," rattles along the gloomy hill, succeeded by another echoing roar of musketry and a shock of artillery, and again the trees the tents and everything about live as in a momentary day; and again the whizzing bullets are followed by moans and dying words. But now the flashes come from the flats also, and from simultaneous volleys, the firing runs into an incessant roar, the hill and valley are continuous sheets of living flame and the sky is bright with the glare. Then again the British dash forward and charge with the bayonet on those making a stand. They broke and fled. Other corps of the enemy formed and were broken by bayonet charges until all were scattered and routed. "Charging an army, while all the world wondered!" The road was littered with arms, knapsacks and accoutrements thrown away in the flight. The American cannon were used in the fight, as the old church had a number of shot holes in it, showing that in the confusion the guns had been fired just where they stood; later however they were turned on the enemy and helped to complete his rout. They did not halt till they reached the forty-mile creek where they camped over night But Sir James Yeo having sailed from Kingston on the third with his squadron for the purpose of annoying the enemy at the head of the lake, appeared

off this creek at daylight of the seventh. The schooners "Beresford" and "Sydney Smith," commenced fire and caused the Americans (now re-enforced by Generals Lewis and Boyd),to break camp and retreat to Fort George on the Niagara River, leaving behind 500 tents, 100 stand of arms, 140 barrels of flour and about 70 wounded men who were duly taken care of.

General Vincent's official report of the battle says: "The action terminated before daylight, when three guns and one brass howitzer, with three tumbrels, two Brigadier Generals, Chandler and Winder, first and second in command, and upwards of 100 officers and privates remained in our hands. General return of our killed, wounded and missing: 1 officer, 22 non-commissioned officers and men killed; 12 officers, 124 non-commissioned officers and men wounded, and 55 non commissioned officers and men missing." This loss in a half hour's fight made a large gulf in 704 men. All the honor of this sharp and effectual repulse of an enemy, outnumbering them 5 to 1, is due to the decision, energy and judgment of Col. Harvey as the leader of a brave, active and faithful band of British and Canadian soldiers.

Think of it! 700 foot soldiers, after a long and tiresome march, with no reserve to fall back upon in case of disaster, in the dead of night with unloaded guns, charging with fixed bayonets, an army of 3,500

men! Was the charge of the 600 at Balaclava in broad daylight, with armies in support, more brave? Was the charge at Kassassin, in the early dawn of morning, with thousands of comrades behind them, more courageous? And yet for 76 long years no monument or stone has been erected to perpetuate their memory, or designate their sleeping place; but the God of nature, to remind man of his duty has in the springtime of each intervening year, caused the buds to blossom into beauty and shed their snowy laurels to perfume and hallow their anniversary day.

"These be thy heroes, Canada;
Stern was the test
And sorely pressed,
That proved their blood best of the best,
And when for Canada you pray,
Implore kind Heaven
That, like a leaven,
The hero blood which then was given
May quicken in her veins alway;
That from those worthy sires may spring,
In numbers as the stars,
Strong hearted sons, whose glorying
Shall be in right,
Though recreant might
Be strong against her in the fight,
And many be her scars;
So like the sun her honored name
Shall shine to latest years the same."